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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS 11/10/09

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ARTICLES:

- (1) Poll on Hatoyama cabinet, political parties

Questions & Answers  
(Figures shown in percentage)

Q: Do you support the Hatoyama cabinet?

Yes 63

No 27

Other answers (O/A) 5

No answer (N/A) 5

Q: (Only for those who answered "yes" to the foregoing question)  
Pick only one from among the following reasons for your approval of  
the Hatoyama cabinet.

Something can be expected of its policy measures 29

The prime minister is aiming to make policy decisions at the  
initiative of politicians 21

The prime minister has leadership ability 6

There's something stable about the prime minister 5

His cabinet's lineup is good 6

Because it's a non-Liberal Democratic Party government 31

O/A 0

N/A 2

Q: (Only for those who answered "no" to the foregoing question) Pick  
only one from among the following reasons for your disapproval of

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the Hatoyama cabinet.

Nothing can be expected of its policy measures 34

Nothing can be expected of its policy decisions made at the  
initiative of politicians 16

The prime minister lacks leadership ability 13

There's nothing stable about the prime minister 11

His cabinet's lineup is not good 10

Because it's a non-Liberal Democratic Party government 12

O/A 1

N/A 2

Q: Which political party do you support now? Pick only one.

Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) 13

Liberal Democratic Party (LDP or Jiminto) 19

New Komeito (NK) 3

Japanese Communist Party (JCP) 2

Social Democratic Party (SDP or Shaminto) 2

Your Party (YP or Minna no To) 1

People's New Party (PNP or Kokumin Shinto) ---

Reform Club (RC or Kaikaku Kurabu) ---

New Party Nippon (NPN or Shinto Nippon) 0

Other political parties 0

None 28

N/A 1

Q: The Hatoyama cabinet is a tripartite coalition government of the  
DPJ, SDP, and PNP. Do you approve of this combination of political  
parties in office?

Yes 31

No 56

N/A 12

Q: Do you think the Hatoyama cabinet has been able to make policy  
decisions based on its political initiative without depending on  
bureaucrats?

Yes 28

No 55

N/A 17

Q: Do you approve of the Hatoyama cabinet's policy of providing

child allowance handouts?

Yes 56  
No 39  
N/A 5

Q: Do you approve of the Hatoyama cabinet's policy of making the expressways toll-free in principle?

Yes 21  
No 73  
N/A 6

Q: Do you approve of the Hatoyama cabinet's policy of ending the Maritime Self-Defense Force's refueling mission in the Indian Ocean by next January when the current antiterror law expires?

Yes 47

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No 34  
N/A 19

Q: Do you approve of the Hatoyama cabinet's policy of reducing Japan's greenhouse gas emissions by 25 PERCENT from 1990 levels by 2020?

Yes 75  
No 16  
N/A 9

Q: Do you think the policies incorporated in the DPJ's manifesto for this summer's election for the House of Representatives should be implemented even if the issuance of deficit-covering government bonds has to be increased, or do you think some of these policies should be forgone so as not to increase the issuance of government bonds?

All of the policies should be implemented 8  
Some of the policies should be foregone 85  
N/A 7

Q: Do you approve of the Hatoyama cabinet's policy of overhauling the Koizumi cabinet's postal privatization?

Yes 54  
No 33  
N/A 13

Q: Do you approve of the appointment of former Administrative Vice Finance Minister Jiro Saito as Japan Post's new president?

Yes 27  
No 52  
N/A 21

Q: What do you think about the pending issue of relocating the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station in Okinawa Prefecture?

It would be better to relocate the airfield in line with the agreement reached between the Japanese and U.S. governments 31  
It would be better to slightly modify the relocation plan 32  
It would be better to overhaul the relocation plan 19  
N/A 17

Q: The government has plans to bail Japan Airlines out of financial trouble and turn it around. Do you agree with this?

Yes 41  
No 50  
N/A 9

Q: Do you think Prime Minister Hatoyama has fulfilled his accountability on his own politics-and-money problems, such as his fund-managing body's falsification of reports on political donations?

Yes 19  
No 73  
N/A 9

Polling methodology: The survey was conducted Nov. 6-8 across the  
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nation on a computer-aided random digit dialing (RDD) basis.  
Households with one or more eligible voters totaled 1,753. Valid  
answers were obtained from 1,074 persons (61 PERCENT ).

(Note) In some cases, the total percentage does not add up to 100  
PERCENT due to rounding.

(2) Japan, U.S. adrift (Part 1): Bilateral alliance at crossroads;  
Futenma relocation issue out of control; "winter period," "danger  
zone"; distrust in Japan will continue

MAINICHI (Top play) (Abridged slightly)  
November 10, 2009

Takashi Sudo, Yu Takayama

"It is serious enough to be reported to the U.S. President. How  
could he make such a statement without consulting with us? We want  
to hear his true intention."

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell expressed his anger  
this way upon meeting with Senior Vice-Foreign Minister Koichi  
Takemasa at a Tokyo hotel on the morning of Oct. 12.

Two days earlier, a Japan-China-South Korea summit was held in  
Beijing. At the outset of the meeting, Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama  
said: "Japan has been relying excessively on the United States. We  
want to create policy that places more emphasis on Asia."

This statement, which drew a smile from Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao,  
reached the United States in no time, amplifying Washington's  
concern and frustration with the Hatoyama administration's stance to  
move away from the United States.

Hatoyama held his first summit meeting with President Barack Obama  
in New York on Sept. 23, in which both played up a policy direction  
to build a relationship of trust, shelving specific issues.

That was just a month and half ago. Today, Japan-U.S. relations are  
said to be in a "winter period" or a "danger zone."

The discord between Japan and the United States is ascribable to the  
Hatoyama administration's decision to end the Maritime Self-Defense  
Force's refueling mission in the Indian Ocean and the East Asian  
community concept advocated by Hatoyama. But the biggest cause is  
the Hatoyama administration's disunity regarding the relocation of  
the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station (in Ginowan, Okinawa  
Prefecture).

The Prime Minister intends to postpone a settlement to the issue  
until after the Nago mayoral election next January with a view to  
moving the air station out of Okinawa, as was pledged during the  
latest House of Representatives election. Meanwhile, Foreign  
Minister Katsuya Okada is exploring ways to integrate Futenma with  
Kadena Air Base (in the town of Kadena within the prefecture) in a  
bid to settle the matter before the end of the year. On the other  
hand, Defense Minister Toshimi Kitazawa is eager to reach a decision  
to relocate the base to the coastal area of Camp Schwab (in Henoko  
in the city of Nago).

Although the three leaders remain wide apart regarding Futenma, no  
one has volunteered to serve as a mediator. "They should stick to

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their respective views to allow the Prime Minister to make a final  
decision," a person close to the Prime Minister said. "If Japan

listens to what the United States says just because their relationship is somewhat tense, Tokyo will not be able to break away from its subservient attitude to Washington."

It is clear that there is the calculation to allow the Prime Minister to use the discord in the cabinet to demonstrate his political leadership and to make it a stepping stone to an equal Japan-U.S. alliance by putting an end to Japan's diplomacy of blindly following the United States.

Shortly after the launch of the Hatoyama administration, Campbell demonstrated the stance of watching the new Japanese administration without applying pressure to it, underlining the need for patience. He is being criticized for taking the wrong step at the initial stage and finds himself in the hot seat within the government. Meanwhile, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates strongly pressured Tokyo to implement the current Futenma relocation plan as agreed upon during his visit to Japan on Oct. 20-21. But his approach drew a backlash from Japan, with a source familiar with Japan-U.S. relations saying, "He acted like an occupation forces' commander. The screw popped out as it was tightened too much."

The governments of Japan and the United States intend to reaffirm a policy direction to strengthen the bilateral alliance by avoiding in-depth talks on the Futenma issue during the upcoming Hatoyama-Obama meeting. That shows a sense of crisis. The bilateral alliance is at a crossroads.

Bruce Klingner, a former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) official and currently a senior research fellow at the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank, pointed out some similarities between the Hatoyama administration and the former South Korean administration led by President Roh Moo Hyun, who dampened U.S.-ROK relations, putting weight on anti-U.S. groups. "The Obama administration would remain distrustful of Japan even after the Futenma issue is settled," Klingner said. "This is very similar to the relations between the United States and South Korea during the former Roh Moo Hyun administration."

(3) Hatoyama administration is not considering Japan's defense

SANKEI (Page 8) (Full)  
November 7, 2009

By Yoshihisa Komori, Washington

Thoughtless remarks made in a casual manner (by senior government officials) are rattling the Japan-U.S. alliance. The prime minister and cabinet ministers, even while defining the Japan-U.S. alliance as the cornerstone of Japan's foreign policy, have also said that the government will review the alliance. They have indicated they will distance themselves from the U.S. and step up efforts to build a framework for collective security in Asia. Particularly on the issue of relocating the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station in Okinawa, contradictory remarks are cropping up every day, like a lunch special that changes from day to day.

Refraining from negatively reacting to the Hatoyama administration's inconsistent policy toward and betrayal of Japan-U.S. security arrangements, the U.S. government of President Barack Obama had

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ostensibly tried to maintain good relations with Japan. But Washington now appears to have altered its approach and decided to frankly express its dissatisfaction and disagreement with Japan. Despite this, the Obama administration has indicated acceptance of Japan's proposal for sidestepping the Futenma issue during the Japan-U.S. summit meeting to be held during President Obama's visit to Japan. Public support for the Obama administration has been on the decline, and the administration has been in a quandary over health insurance reform. Under such circumstances, the administration probably wants to avoid the criticism that it made Japan-U.S. relations even worse.

On the U.S. side, persons in both the public and private sectors involved in the Japan-U.S. alliance complain that the Hatoyama

administration seems not to be giving consideration to Japan's defense.

I asked National Defense University Professor Jim Przystup, who has been involved in the Japan-U.S. alliance for as many as 30 years, and James Auer, director of the Center for U.S.-Japan Studies and Cooperation at the Vanderbilt Institute for Public Policy Studies, for their views about the Hatoyama administration's approach toward the bilateral alliance.

Przystup addressed Japan-U.S. security issues as a member of the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Relations in the 1970s and was also responsible for Japanese affairs at the state and defense departments under successive U.S. administrations. He said:

"Statements by the Hatoyama administration about the Japan-U.S. alliance remind us of the god with multiple heads in India. We don't know which remarks we should believe. ... The Obama administration initially gave the new Japanese government the wrong message -- that the U.S. will allow Japan to say anything it wants to say. In this respect, the Obama administration is also to blame. However, in the history of the Japan-U.S. alliance I have never seen such deep confusion. ... The Hatoyama administration has addressed the Japan-U.S. alliance in relation to the environment or at most, politics. But it seems oblivious of the key element - security and military affairs."

The Japan-U.S. alliance certainly contains political, diplomatic and environmental components, but its core component is military affairs. The Hatoyama administration has acted as if the core element did not exist, according to analysis by Przystup. In other words, the Hatoyama administration has ignored the main purpose of the alliance -- the defense of Japan.

After serving as director of Japan Desk at the Defense Department in the 1970s and 1980s, Auer has continued exchanging views with people in the Japanese defense establishment. He pointed out: "The Hatoyama administration seems to have no awareness of the need to protect Japan's security, although doing so is the government's responsibility." In reference to the Futenma issue, Auer emphasized: "The administration has discussed only details and has not considered why U.S. military bases exist in Japan. There is no doubt the new administration 'cannot see the forest for the trees'."

Auer also refuted the Democratic Party of Japan's assertion that "Japan has blindly followed the U.S.:" "If Japan truly followed what U.S. said, the Self-Defense Forces and defense spending would be

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more than double their current levels. Japan would have allowed the SDF to exercise the right to collective self-defense and stationed combat forces in Afghanistan."

The two American commentators stressed the need to maintain the Japan-U.S. alliance from the viewpoint of U.S. national interests, but they have taken a friendly stance toward Japan, that is, a stance of focusing on Japan's good points. It is unprecedented for such observers to lash out at Japan to this degree.

Against this background, Governor of Kanagawa Prefecture Shigefumi Matsuzawa visited Washington to discuss issues related to U.S. military bases in Japan and delivered a speech on Nov. 5. His words were encouraging. Although Matsuzawa supports DPJ policies, he stated in the speech: "The Japan-U.S. alliance is indispensable not only for Japan's national security but also for the stability of the Asia-Pacific region. In particular, when taking into consideration such threats as North Korea's nuclear and missile development and China's maritime expansion, we realize the importance of the presence of U.S. military bases in Okinawa." The governor, while stressing the need to reduce the burden imposed on Okinawa, emphasized that the Japan-U.S. alliance is the sole way to ensure Japan's national security."

(4) Two deadlines for Hatoyama administration regarding Futenma relocation

Foreign and security affairs both in Japan and the United are all talking about a certain paper. The paper concludes with the following statement:

"(The Hatoyama administration) openly brought up delicate issues, such as an investigation into the 'secret pacts,' (a revision) of the Status of Forces Agreement, and (a reduction in) host nation support, several weeks before President Barack Obama's first visit to Japan. This is almost tantamount to telling the President not to come to Japan."

The article was written by Ralph Cossa, executive director of the Pacific Forum, a think tank in Hawaii, and his colleagues.

Cossa, who serves as the U.S. side's chair for Japan-U.S. security seminars held annually by the Forum, the Foreign Ministry, and other organizations, is well-versed in Japanese and security affairs. The Foreign Ministry puts great faith in him. That is why his bold criticism of the Hatoyama administration is drawing attention. U.S. Council on Foreign Relations senior fellow Sheila Smith, also known as a Japan expert, is also harsh toward the Hatoyama administration, describing its policy toward the United States as "Washington passing."

The U.S. government cannot conceal its confusion either. During his stay in Japan, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates strongly pressed Tokyo to implement the existing Futenma relocation plan as agreed upon, but that did not prove to be successful. On Nov. 5, Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell visited Japan. But the best he could do was to confirm the policy direction to put off difficult issues until after President Obama's visit next week.

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Some in Washington are becoming increasingly critical of the Japan experts who have been called for practicing "patience." Criticism of the Hatoyama administration is likely to increase.

Of all the challenges facing the management of the bilateral alliance, some think the Futenma issue is the most serious, citing two deadlines.

One is the budget. The U.S. Congress is now deliberating on the fiscal 2010 budget bill. Unless Japan carries out the realignment of U.S. forces in Japan, including the relocation of Futenma Air Station, as agreed upon, the U.S. Congress might not approve the cost of relocating the U.S. Marines from Okinawa to Guam, and the entire agreement might be derailed as a result. The end of the year is the de facto deadline. "If the agreement is derailed, putting it back on track will difficult," said Robin Sakoda, a former director of the Department of Defense Office of Japanese Affairs.

The other deadline is based on the political situation in Okinawa. Since the Hatoyama administration has shown a stance of exploring other options, such as moving Futenma out of Okinawa and integrating Futenma with Kadena Air Base, Nago's resolve to accept the envisaged replacement facility has begun to weaken. A rally by Okinawa residents protesting the idea of relocating Futenma within the prefecture is scheduled to take place this weekend in Ginowan, which currently hosts Futenma Air Station. If the incumbent in favor of relocating Futenma to the Henoko district is defeated in the Nago mayoral election next January, such a trend will become more pronounced. Even if the government decides that there is no other option besides the Henoko plan, the situation will not return to what it was.

"The Hatoyama administration probably plans to examine (other options) by keeping (the Henoko plan) in the refrigerator, but (the Henoko plan) will spoil during that time," noted former White House National Security Council Senior Asian Director Michael Green.

Regardless of the decision it makes, the Hatoyama administration

must act swiftly in coming to a conclusion.

(5) Aomori Prefecture, Tsugaru City protest U.S. Army "civilian employee's" fatal DUI incident

TOO NIPPO (Page 24) (Full)  
November 6, 2009

In connection with the incident in which a civilian employee of the U.S. Army's Shariki Communications Site, 48, driving under the influence of alcohol (DUI), crashed into the railing of a bridge and died on Oct. 30 in Nakadomari-machi, Tsugaru City, the city and Aomori Prefecture on Nov. 5 handed a letter of protest to Captain Kirby J. Atwell, representative of the military base, and strongly demanded that U.S. military personnel abide by Japanese laws.

According to the Tsugaru City government, general affairs chief Arihiko Yamamoto went to the Communications Site and handed a letter signed by Mayor Hiroyoshi Fukushima to Capt. Atwell. Atwell apologized and said: "This incident is for us, too, truly regrettable. It has become a big obstacle." He added: "We will revise our traffic safety program and conduct regular training in order not to forget the lesson learned from this incident."

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Aomori Prefecture also presented a letter to Shingo Masuda, chief of the Tohoku Defense Bureau, through the Misawa Defense Office, asking him to lodge a protest with U.S. forces.

(6) U.S. Army staff sergeant detained in fatal hit-and-run incident in Okinawa

YOMIURI (Page 17) (Excerpts)  
Evening, November 10, 2009

In connection with the fatal hit-and-run incident that occurred in Sobe, Yomitan Village, Okinawa Prefecture, U.S. Forces Okinawa detained a U.S. Army staff sergeant in his 20s who owns the car impounded by the Okinawa police on suspicion of being involved in this incident.

In light of this, the Okinawa police have searched the staff sergeant's off-base apartment in Nagahama, Yomitan on suspicion of violating the Road Traffic Law (hit-and-run) and negligent driving resulting in death.

The police will seek cooperation from the U.S. forces in the investigation of this case and plan to question the staff sergeant directly on a voluntary basis.

The staff sergeant's car was brought to a garage in Kadena Town, some 5 kilometers from the scene of the accident, for repairs on Nov. 7, with the windshield broken and hair stuck to the car. This was later impounded by the Okinawa police. U.S. Forces Okinawa began questioning him on a voluntary basis inside the military base on Nov. 9.

The U.S. forces also began conducting searches in the U.S. Army's Torii Station (in Yomitan), where the staff sergeant works, from the morning of Nov. 10.

James Woodard, commander of U.S. Army Okinawa, visited the Yomitan village government office on the morning of Nov. 10 to meet Mayor Keizo Yasuda. He explained that, "We have detained the army officer who drove the car. We will do our best if there is a formal request from the Japanese side for the handover of custody (before indictment)." Yasuda told him that he strongly demands the early turnover of custody.

Under the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), the U.S. forces will consider favorably any request for the handover of custody of the suspect detained by the U.S. side before indictment in cases involving murder, rape, and other heinous crimes. So far, the turnover of custody has taken place in five cases. However, the Okinawa police reckon that it will be difficult to make a request



for turnover of custody in a hit-and-run case.

The government is increasingly concerned that "heightened anti-military base sentiments in the local communities may affect the Japan-U.S. summit meeting on Nov. 13," according to a senior Ministry of Foreign Affairs official. It is stepping up efforts to collect information through government offices in Okinawa. Defense Minister Toshimi Kitazawa stated at a news conference that, "Since this is an outrageous incident, I can imagine the feelings of the Okinawan people to a certain extent," indicating that this will inevitably affect the question of the relocation of the U.S. Marines' Futenma Air Station.

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However, commenting on whether the government will demand the handover of custody of the suspect, if he is found to be a U.S. soldier, before indictment in accordance with SOFA, Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirofumi Hirano said: "My feeling is that the question of handover will not come up, since (pre-indictment turnover of custody) applies only to serious crimes, such as murder."

(7) Interview with PRC expert on U.S. affairs Shi Yinhong:  
Instability of Hatoyama administration undesirable

NIKKEI (Page 1) (Full)  
November 10, 2009

Interview with Shi Yinhong, director of Research Center of American Affairs, Renmin University of China, by China Bureau chief Taku Shinada

Shinada: What do you think of the current state of Japan-U.S. relations?

Shi: Japan has followed the U.S. on everything in foreign policy until now. The administration has begun to assert itself a little bit, so the U.S. is beginning to have doubts about Japan. However, increasing Japan's independence is in line with Japan's popular will and national pride. I welcome such a posture. Japan will also be recognized (by other countries) as a country that has its own opinion.

The Yukio Hatoyama administration has stated repeatedly that the Japan-U.S. alliance is the linchpin of Japan's foreign policy. That is the administration's true sentiment, so the U.S. is worrying too much.

Shinada: What is the Chinese government's position?

Shi: China has not commented on the Japan-U.S. relationship (for the past few decades). The PRC government knows that the Japan-U.S. alliance will continue. While it is not in favor of this alliance, it accepts it as a fait accompli. It will probably not make any public comments in this case.

No impact on economy

Shinada: Won't the strained Japan-U.S. relationship have any influence on Asia and China?

Shi: A serious weakening of the political base of Prime Minister Hatoyama and the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) caused by setbacks in diplomacy toward the United States is probably not a scenario that the Chinese government would like to see. Compared to the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) administration, the DPJ administration places more importance on friendly relations with China. A weakening of the Hatoyama administration would not be desirable for China.

Furthermore, if the Japan-U.S. issues drag on, the Hatoyama administration will have to devote time to dealing with them. Then, it will not have time to strengthen relations with China and promote multilateral cooperation in Asia. I hope that Prime Minister Hatoyama will make an official visit to China and senior Chinese leaders will visit Japan at an early date.

Right now, while there is trade friction between China and the U.S., there is no such friction between Japan and the U.S., unlike in the 1980s and 1990s. Discord in Japan-U.S. diplomacy will not affect bilateral economic relations or have a major impact on the world economy.

Shinada: You are saying there won't be any major change in the Japan-U.S. relationship?

Shi: It is impossible for Japan to destroy the Japan-U.S. alliance. The forming of this alliance is a major event in postwar history. There is nothing in this world that can shake that alliance.

I think if the Hatoyama administration handles the issues capably, the U.S. will accept Japan's position in the end. Germany and the UK are also speaking up in dealing with the U.S. This is normal. I think the U.S. will accept Japan's position since it also relies on Japan.

The present strain in the Japan-U.S. relationship reflects the United States' superpower mentality, while Japan's consciousness as a major power is inadequate. The U.S. does not treat Japan as an equal.

Shinada: Are you concerned that Japan may move toward building up its own military capability?

Shi: If the same thing happened under the LDP's Koizumi or Abe administration, I would suspect a possible buildup of Japan's defense capability, but there is no need to have such concerns under the present DPJ administration.

Asia diplomacy welcomed

Shinada: Two months have passed since the inauguration of the Hatoyama administration.

Shi: I think the Chinese government welcomes that the Hatoyama administration is trying to improve relations with Asian countries and promote multilateral cooperation in East Asia.

Shinada: What do you think of the concept of an East Asian community proposed by Prime Minister Hatoyama?

Shi: Some Japanese politicians assert that the U.S., India, Australia, and other countries should be included in the community. However, the East Asian community should consist of East Asian countries. The U.S. should not become a full member; it can become an observer. It is also unnecessary for India to become an official member. This is the same as the logic for Russia, Egypt, Algeria, and other countries not becoming members of the European Union (EU). If half of the UN members become members, I don't think this is in line with the wishes of the people of the East Asian countries.

China has no intention to play a leadership role in East Asia. I think a system of collective leadership (by the leaders of various countries) will emerge in East Asia in the future. China will not be able to catch up with Japanese and U.S. technology even in 50 or 100 years. Militarily, it will not be able to catch up with the U.S. even in 50 or 100 years. The theory of the China threat is off the mark.

(8) Mounting pressure on Japan to sign Hague Convention: Some Japanese listed as wanted on suspicion of abducting their own children

The Hague Convention is designed to deal with cross-border removal of a child by one of the parents without the consent of the other. Japan has not yet signed the Convention. Troubles involving Japanese have increased proportionately with the increase in international marriages. There have been some cases that have developed into criminal cases. Pressure on Japan to sign the Convention is mounting.

According to the U.S., Britain, France and Canada, the number of cases in which a Japanese parent returned home with a child without the consent of their ex-spouse totaled about 160 in May this year. Some have even been listed as wanted on suspicion of abduction. In October, 10 countries, including the four countries mentioned above, called on Justice Minister Keiko Chiba to have Japan sign the Convention. Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada said, "I would like to give positive consideration to the matter."

In Japan, too, the American ex-husband of a Japanese woman in September in Fukuoka tried to take away their two children whom the woman had brought back from the U.S. He was arrested on suspicion of abducting minors. According to the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, approximately 37,000 international marriages were registered last year. This number, which accounts for 5.1 percent of all marriages, is nearly six times the number registered 30 years ago. Divorces among such couples have also doubled over the past 10 years.

Against this background, attention is being focused on the fact that there also seem to be many cases in which foreign husbands or wives of Japanese nationals have taken their children away from Japan. Kentaro Masudo, 46, the representative of the International Family Union Support Center, pointed out, "There must be cases that have not been brought to light. It would be advantageous for Japan to sign the Convention." However, a source familiar with this issue is against Japan signing the Convention, noting that 80-90 percent of Japanese women who return home with their children are victims of domestic violence.

The Hague Convention is a treaty designed to deal with cases in which a parent takes a child away from their ex-spouse without their consent. It was adopted in 1980 and came into force in 1983. In the event the parent whose child has been taken away by the other seeks the return of the child, the other country is obliged to locate the whereabouts the child and return him or her to his or her country of residence. The purpose of the Convention is to return the child to his or her former environment in order to determine the custody of the child. The number of signatory countries - mainly European countries and the U.S. -- stood at 81 in May. Among the Group of Seven industrialized countries, Japan is the only country that has yet to sign the Convention.

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